



Society's Moral Failure in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

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Abstract: This work intends to reveal the essence or meaning of the moral failure of the society in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Blacks, the victims of that inhumanity are deprived of all legal, social, human rights, in favor of the white community. Here and there, they are exposed to constant abuses. The white society, in its quest for welfare, has established trade in Negroes. In that mercantile world where profitability is the catchword, Negro worth is valued for money. Along with the trade are evils such as the mistreatment, the forcible separations or dislocation of slave families, etc. The life of the slave is interwoven with physical, psychological and emotional sufferings; all that being expertly planned by white folks. Society in *U.T.C* consists of the white and black communities.

Keywords: Meaning, Essence, Slavery, Society, Morals, Failure.

Résumé: Cette étude révèle l'essence de la faillite sociale dans *Uncle Tom's Cabin* de Harriet Beecher Stowe. Les Noirs, les victimes de cette pratique inhumaine sont privés de tous droits légaux, sociaux et humains, au profit de la communauté blanche. Ici et là, ils sont constamment soumis à des abus. Dans sa quête du bien-être, la société blanche a institué la traite négrière. Dans ce monde mercantile où le slogan est le profit, la valeur du Noir est estimée en termes monétaires. A la traite, sont associés des maux tels que la maltraitance, les séparations forcées ou la dislocation des familles d'esclaves, etc. La vie de ces derniers est indissociable des souffrances physiques, psychologiques et émotionnelles;

Mots clefs: Sens, Essence, Esclavage, Société, Morale, Echec.

Introduction

An argument used by whites to justify slavery was that blacks were not fully human beings. Such a prejudice spurred them to enforce, and even reinforce their practice of slavery. As a response, a great number of writers molded opinion to denounce the inhumanity of the system. Among those abolitionists were Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, David Walker and Harriet Beecher Stowe.¹ Their writings described a

¹Harriet Tubman was an abolitionist woman who escaped from bondage at the age of twenty-five. Later in freedom, she became a conductor for the Underground Railroad. She made trips back to the south to help bring slaves to freedom. [Source : *Encyclopedia of Black America*, by W. Augustus Low (ed), New York : Da Capo Press, 1981].

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), born Isabel Baumfree, a slave, became deeply religious. She was freed in 1827, and in 1843, as a result of a religious vision, she left her home in New York, with a new name—Sojourner Truth. Traveling to rallies on abolition, she became the first outstanding Afro-American woman to speak out publicly against slavery. [Source: *Encyclopedia of Black America*, p. 819].

racist and oppressive environment. Having been acquainted with slavery, and being extremely pious, Harriet Beecher Stowe, a white woman, wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel about slavery, with a view to “bringing to the knowledge and sympathies of the world, the lowly, the oppressed, and forgotten.”² The object of *U.T.C.* was, as she said, “to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, ... to show their wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust as to defeat and do away the good effects of all that can be attempted for them, by their best friends, under it.”³

U.T.C.'s emotional power and moral effect upon human minds helped mold the antislavery feeling. It presents the scene of a black man's pathetic death and Christ-like forgiveness of his persecutors. Exhibiting slavery in a living and dramatic reality, it tries to demonstrate the brutal nature of slavery, and its harmful effects on all people associated with it. In painting that scene of shocking inhumanity, it holds slavery up to the public in an odious light. It depicts a society of slaveholders dead to all morality, and hence, the moral failure of society.

U.T.C. was published in 1852, that is more than one century ago. A question then arises as: what motivation may lead anyone to read it today? How does the novel bear upon our present? Indeed, there are less exalted reasons. In fact, he who picks up *U.T.C.* faces two tasks. First, curiosity leads him to read it so as to see it for what it really is. He then discovers that it is about slavery. Besides, it gives him an opportunity to experience some of the evils slaves underwent, as well as the difficulties the American society faced in deciding what was to be done with that peculiar institution. The task of discovering what *U.T.C.* is about implicitly drives the reader to a second one—a consideration of the moment in time. That second phase guides the reader to the historical context of the novel, which provides the terms of the literary action. The modern reader has then to become both a literary critic and a social historian. This study tries to delineate the immorality of the society in *U.T.C.* To what extent has that society morally failed? The controlling idea of this paper is thus focused on a search for the essence or meaning of society's moral failure. Such a statement suggests that the society of *U.T.C.*, through

William W. Brown is remembered for his Narrative *William W. Brown: A Fugitive*. He dealt with slavery by drawing his personal experiences; notably in *Clotel, or the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853).

David Walker's *Appeal* called on Negroes to revolt against their masters. [Encyclopedia of Black America, pp. 793-830.]

²Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, New York, A Signet Classic, 1996, Preface v. The original title of the novel was *Uncle Tom's Cabin or The Man That Was A Thing*. (*U.T.C.* 478) However, the subtitle changed to the one we now have, that is, “Life Among the Lowly.”

Henceforth, *U.T.C.* will stand for the abbreviation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

³ *Ibid*, vi.

its deeds, has completely infringed moral values. Instead of doing the good that is the core element of morals and that is therefore looked for, it has specialized in evil doing. As a consequence, it has morally failed. What does this imply?

Concept of Morality

Roughly, morals refers to a group of rules of which one thinks they must exist, for they would realize what is good—desirable, wise, adequate and salutary for an ideal social life. They would dictate what is fitting or wholly recommendable and directed toward the welfare of each individual, and hence, of society as a whole. Morals is the cultivation of ideal right—principles held to be in accordance with justice and goodness. It dictates a general rule of right living—rule conceived as universal, conventional and unchanging. It refers to rule as having God’s will, that of mankind, as revealed to human reason or conscience. By obliging and encouraging every human creature to do good and avoid evil, morals promotes rectitude, correct and humane conduct in society.

It seems impossible for human beings to reach moral sublimity, that is, moral excellence, but at least, doing good and avoiding evil is feasible. Human beings are free to choose between good and evil. Thus, they are responsible for their deeds. Reason, liberty, conscience and responsibility are elements that set man as a moral creature. That moral characteristic makes him superior to the other earthly living creatures. It is that superiority which is admittedly called human dignity that sets the fundamental difference between men and animals. Though human beings are not angels, they are gifted with a moral conscience—a capacity inherent to them and that permits them to produce ethical judgements on their own deeds as well as those of others.

That moral conscience is an intrinsic ability that should allow every individual in society to distinguish good from evil, and then to find himself obliged to do good and avoid evil. Every human being is able to respect others. He may consider human dignity, and then treat others with politeness, attention, care, justice and charity. Toward others, he should, at least, respect the duty of justice and of charity. The rule for justice toward others is commonly known as: “do not to others that which you do not want them to do toward you.” Then the rule for charity is: “do to others what you do want them to do toward you.” justice is respect. Charity involves love, fraternity and assistance. Morals is intended to teach how to reach a friendly and equitable conduct in society. It promotes social welfare and justice. Its daily practice by every individual should inevitably result in moral success, and therefore in the creation of a moral society. Slavery is based on the conception of the Negro as a slave; a possession, a thing or article of trade. It subordinates the black race to the white one. Exploitative and cruel, it involved several

evils. No matter how profitable to the so-called “superior” race, that peculiar institution represented a trauma for blacks; an unspeakable evil. The essence of that moral failure is due to some facts inherent to the institution of slavery, that is, verbal prejudices, slave laws, slave trade, mistreatments, disorganization of slave families, traumatic slave life.

Verbal prejudices

Slavery in America would not have been possible if whites had not accommodated the black man’s human status to a mere chattel to make him fit the kind of labor force they desired. Whites established a strategy by means of which they could not only keep the Negro as a property, but also discipline him so that they could use and exploit him the best way. They started to discriminate against blacks and to treat them badly. Racism then developed. It is exemplified in *U.T.C* by characters such as Henrique, Alfred, Haley, Marie St. Clare and Simon Legree. Their opinion is that blacks are an inferior race. They think that blacks and whites do not have the same human attributes, and that it would be a great mistake to elevate them on any sort of equality with whites. Marie St. Clare advises Evangeline, her daughter, as follows: “[I]t isn’t proper to treat them [blacks] JUST as we would our relations, or people in our own class of life.” (*U.T.C*, 199) Trying to justify the discrimination and subordination of blacks, Alfred argues: ““We can see plainly enough that all men are Not born free, nor born equal; they are born anything else It is the educated, the intelligent, the wealthy, the refined who ought to have equal rights, and not the CANAILLE.’” (*U.T.C*, 289)

By denying any natural right of the Negro, Alfred subordinates him and elevates the white race as civilized. He despises the black race as contemptible and dishonest. Alfred then “redefines” blacks as uneducated, unintelligent, unreasonable, poor and primitive beings. Most whites regard them as nothing but stupid, childish, spiteful, and undesirable wretches fit for being treated rough, brutalized, hacked, dragged round the world and then sold to work and serve the superior race—whites. After having preconceived contemptible ideas about Negroes, and denied their human nature, it is then fitting for the enslavers to establish a method. To avoid any possible slave rebellion, it seems logical that a law should be made to intimidate and oblige Negroes to submission. So, one of the most important cogs of the system is then set, that is, draconian and immoral slave laws.

Immorality of the Slave Trade

The slave trade, in *U.T.C*, mostly refers to the buying and selling of slaves. It involves the capturing, selling, buying, transporting and exchanging the commodities—here slaves—



within, either a state or between states. The numerous slave sales in *U.T.C.* mostly result from causes such as the slaveowner's debts, bankruptcy, or death. Besides, the frequent moving of owners from one place to another are a common cause. Being unable to pay his debts, Mr. Shelby feels obliged to sell Tom and Harris, Eliza's little child, for the benefit of Haley, his creditor. In the same order of things, after Augustine St. Clare's death, Marie, his widow, sells a great number of his servants, among whom Tom.

Just as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 led to the creation of a group of professional bounty hunters, some characters in *U.T.C.* practice the slave trade as a full-time occupation to make a living. Thus, they wander throughout the land to buy slaves from one place to another, from slave-owners who want to get rid of theirs. Most often, those traders are called upon through public announcements in the press, as follows:

EXECUTOR'S SALE,—Negroes!—Agreeably to order of court, will be sold, on Tuesday, February 20, before the Court-house door, in the town of Washington, Kentucky, the following Negroes: Hagar, aged 60; John, aged 30; Ben 21; Saul, aged 25; Albert, aged 14. Sold for the benefit of the creditors and heirs of the estate of Jesse Blutchford, Esq. (*U.T.C.*,132)

Thus, on the slave market, human beings, considered as articles, are warehoused. Indeed, one cannot help imagining some ill-smelling and neglected room, comparable to a den, just at the image of the Negro in the whites' minds. Yet, it is not a quite foul place. The warehouse is maintained clean because for the auctioneer, human property on the market is of great value, in terms of money. Thus, the trader does everything to keep his livestock in good health. Hence, slaves are decently fed, watched over and kept free from dirt, so that they may come to sale strong, clean and healthy. Public sales, most often, meet with a mixed throng of white bidders intending to purchase. The articles for sale—black men, women and children—are kept in a separate group from spectators. The exposition takes place on a stage. There, Negroes have to pass one after the other, be inspected, and then bought.

Human articles undergo two phases of inspections—the first by the auctioneer, and the other by purchasers. Examination starts from the warehouse where authoritative orders demand slaves to show joyful and shining faces, and be lively before appearing up to the stage. “[B]riskness, alertness, and cheerfulness of appearance before observers are demanded. (*U.T.C.*, 351) Once on the stage, each slave undergoes a severe inspection by his potential buyers. He is carefully examined from hair to toe, according to some principles related to hard labor, and by which his value is to be measured. Some of those criteria mostly involve the physical conditions of the slave's teeth, strength, agility, beauty, breadth, length, education; in short, the good conditions of health for long-lasting hard works. Uncle Tom is not saved that humiliation when a purchaser “seized [him] by the jaw, and pulled open his mouth to inspect his teeth, made him

strip up his sleeve, to show his muscles; turned him round, made him jump and spring, to show his paces.” (*U.T.C.*, 358)

Slave trading is a transaction that is a traumatizing and degrading time for its victims. It is so unbearable that it sometimes results in incidents like death. Having her baby stolen and sold, Lucy committed suicide by throwing herself into the sea. (*U.T.C.*, Chapter XII) In that mercantile world where profitability stands as the catchword, human worth is measured for money. The Negro is then reified. Each of his attributes—religion, beauty, talents and other capabilities are highly valued for money. Once bought, the slave undergoes the phases of the trader’s fancy. He can then be sold again, exchanged for groceries, leased, or mortgaged. On auction, the professional purchaser can afford to buy as many purchases as he is capable of. For fear of losing, he puts handcuffs on their wrists and goes on with a view to forming a gang so as to increase profit.

We then see Haley with his purchases on an Ohio boat on Chapter XII; his gang to be augmented as far as they move, for numerous slaves are temporarily owned and then sold, again and again. Generally, the trader starts the gathering in the northern markets, and drives his purchases to some place to fatten them just as the shepherd fattens his cattle. To make them forget grieves, the master orders them to produce noisy mirth. Those who refuse to obey are considered dangerous, and hence, exposed to horrible forms of cruelty. Once his slaves are well fattened and proved salable, the trader drives his possessions in the South to sell them to planters whose economy rests on slave labor. In the trader’s dealing, the death of a slave is seen as a considerable loss of money. The trade transfers the Negro from one place to another and from one master to another one. In the mercantile world of *U.T.C.*, profitability leads the trader to develop a kind of zootechny. Many traders specialized in the breeding of slaves. Slave trade always goes together with the forcible separations of Negroes from their acquaintances, families, and therefore with the disorganization of those families.

Disorganization of Slave Families

An analysis of the slave family seems essential for a better understanding of slave life. The family appears as the core thing for the slave’s survival. It provides him companionship, love, heat, sexual gratification, pride, self-esteem and courageous bearing of his sufferings. Owing to his family, the slave learns how to be cautious, to avoid punishment, maintain self-esteem and be cooperative with other blacks. The idea of his family is the reason for his endurance and ability to survive on the plantation. It is the instrument that encourages discipline among slaves. Undoubtedly, the black man who loves his wife and children is less likely to be



rebellious or to run away than would a “single” slave. Yet, families are constantly fragmented. The simple threat of being separated from his family is generally sufficient to subdue the most rebellious “married” slave. There is then not the slightest doubt that one of the most brutal aspects of slavery is the destruction of families; a haunting fear which makes the slave’s days miserable.

Too often, slave mothers are separated from their children, for life, and husbands from their wives and offspring. This dreadful moment is so bitterly resented by the ones who are separated that they sometimes regret their existence. For the slave, there is no reason to try to do anything worthwhile or be anything. George Harris’s forced separation from Eliza, in Chapter III, can illustrate that unbearable moment: “George, holding Eliza’s hands, and gazing into her eyes, without moving. They stood silent; then there were last words, and sobs, and bitter weeping’—such parting as those may make whose hope to meet again is as the spider’s web—and the husband and wife were parted.” (*U.T.C.*,30) Separations are always associated with indignation, anger, grief and sorrow. The idea of being separated forever from one’s acquaintance, child, wife, husband, father or mother is an unbearable moment. Thus, looking at the ones he has to leave forever, Tom cannot help shedding tears and having strong and unspeakable feelings. Separation also implies leaving an environment and a home. It implies the parting from friends and every familiar object such as the former master’s estate; a place he has got used to. Tom’s separation from his family, a mournful episode, illustrates desolation and despair. Aunt Chloe, his wife, cannot help crying, and children whimpering.

Still, the trauma of separation cannot be as great as that of a mother from her child. Such has been the case of Susan and Emmeline. (*U.T.C.*, 354) As she goes down the dome of the auction, Susan looks wistfully back at her daughter, the hands of Emmeline were stretching toward her, as to say “mother, don’t forget me!” Looking with agony in the face of her new master, Susan implores him to buy her daughter in vain. Such situations happen every day! The slave trade and forcible separations, unavoidably, put the slave in a terrible isolation and bitter loneliness. They deprive the Negro child from his mother, brothers and sisters, and then, the father from his wife and children. The slave laws leave him unprotected and defenseless. Besides, here and there, humiliating and degrading treatments are observed against him. In such conditions, one cannot help wondering what the slave’s life is like.

Slave Life

The plantation stands as the main setting where slaves live once they leave warehouses. Two kinds of servants are to be distinguished—field hands and domestic ones. Inherent to their

lives is the total deprivation of freedom. Usually, after working hard from dawn to sunset, the weary field hands put tools away, look for livestock, and cook their meals in a very limited time. Mostly, plantation hands must get up before dawn to prepare their meals, feed the livestock, and then rush to the fields before sunrise the next day. Those who are late meet the lash. Their work mainly consists in grubbing and hoeing fields, picking worms off the plants, building fences, cutting down trees, constructing dikes, pulling fodder, clearing new lands, planting rice, sugar, tobacco, cotton and corn, and then harvesting the crop. All these works are seasonal.

As far as domestic hands are concerned, no matter how better food they eat and better clothes they wear, owing to the leftovers from the master's larder and hand-me-downs from his wardrobe, their position does not save them the trouble of doing long-lasting and tiring works. They generally spend their days working as part-time gardeners, cooking, serving meals, caring for the horses, milking the cows, sewing clothes, caring for the master's infant, carding and spinning wool, doing the marketing, churning the milk, dusting the house, sweeping the yard, arranging the dining room, cutting the shrubbery and performing numerous other tasks. Each slave is responsible for several of these tasks. Domestic hands have no regular hours. Besides long hours at the beck and call of their master's day and night, there is the constant embarrassment of being under the watchful eyes of whites. Servants are also subject to the master's frequent desires, just like Marie St. Clare—a mistress who needs attention almost every hour.

Despite their daily efforts, slaves are not allowed to decide for themselves much of what they are to eat. The same can be said of their clothing and shelter. It is always the master who determines the quantity and quality of food, clothing, medical care and shelter adequate for his slaves to survive. To Tom, Legree threw “a coarse bag which contained a peck of corn” as a diet. Tom had to eat that sparingly for a full week. Besides, slaves live in crudely built one-room log cabins with dirty floors and too many cracks in them to allow much comfort during winter. Those cabins are often crowded. Some slaves sleep on the ground or on mattresses of corn shucks without blanket. In this connection, Stowe reveals that “the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.” (*U.T.C.*, 366) On the Legree estate, Tom's cabin is depicted as containing: “mere rude shells, destitute of any species of furniture except a heap of straw, foul [and repelling] with dirt, spread confusedly over the floor, which was merely the bare ground, trodden hard by the tramping of innumerable feet.” (*U.T.C.*, 371) At his disposal, Tom finds nothing but a tattered blanket, which is to be his only bed-clothing, and as a bed, he has nothing but straw.

Another aspect of slave life is mistreatment. The planters' efforts aimed at making their workers submissive and deferential. In so doing, masters show their authority over the slaves, and then the hegemony of whites. Slaves are required to be humble and cheerful in the performance of their tasks. Always having their faces scanned by their master, they are made to reflect, in their countenances, what the master wants than what they feel. They are obliged to be either singing, rejoicing, or displaying signs of perfect content at heart. Furthermore, the master often selects some of his most diligent men to help him rule the other slaves. Those black rulers, also called drivers, overseers or whipping men, are compelled to maintain the slaves at their tasks and to flog them for breaking rules. Thus, caught in a dilemma, the overseers are literally shot at from all sides, for when they are rewarded or praised by their master for a job properly done, they are at the same time hated by the other slaves for hard ruling.

Failure to keep order and discipline among the slaves in the quarters, and inability to account for plantation equipment and to pressure slaves to hard work on plantations, often cause the drivers' demotion or flogging. While the master regards his overseers as the most loyal of slaves, the bondsmen however, regard them as spies and collaborators. Due to differences in the master's family life and religious beliefs, the treatment of slaves differs from one place to another. With cruel masters, strong black men are to suffer from overwork, abuse and starvation. On such places, the overseers' horns sound before sleep or before rest can chase the fatigue of the last day's labor. On the Legree plantation, for example, weary slaves—men and women, return home late in the evening in soiled and tattered garments. They have been pressed from the earliest dawn in the field to work under the lashes of Sambo and Quimbo, the two black drivers. Legree has trained them in "savageness and brutality as systematically as he had his bull-dogs." (*U.T.C.*, 370) He has inculcated in them that Negro overseers have to be always cruel and tyrannical. Sambo and Quimbo hate each other, and all the other slaves hate them both. Thus, Legree can be sure to be informed of whatever happens in his place.

In the slave's life, religion stands as the best weapon acting against cruel treatments. It plays against accommodation and as an instrument of resistance. It provides spiritual comfort as well as relief to each Christian slave, and then to the slave community as a whole. The slave's practice of religion rests mainly on Christian faith and love as well as constant hopes of deliverance, and of the coming of the Promised Land. By providing spiritual release and victory to slaves, religion challenges the slave system, just as Tom, the Christian patriarch, challenges Legree, his authoritative master. From birth to death, the slave undergoes physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional and social sufferings. He suffers physically because of his unavoidable daily overwork and physical treatment; psychologically and spiritually because of

the other evils inherent to slavery. Though he can perform his tasks and survive, he cannot forget his forced separation from his family. Facing these traumatizing facts, he cannot help feeling bitterness. For him, every moment of life represents a calvary; a time of suffering, lack of freedom, starvation, nostalgia, loneliness and desperation. In such a life, the slave undergoes gradual degradation before reaching death.

Plantation Society of the Oppressed

Involving both a white and a black community, society in *U.T.C* is stratified into two major groups. On the one hand, stretches the domineering group—the class of whites, divided into two portions: the class of oppressors, composed of the majority of the white population and the class of generous sympathizers which is composed of the “oppressed” white minority of abolitionists. On the other hand, is the slave community is associated with several harmful social facts. These evils arouse the idea of society’s moral failure. However, what is that society really like? Is it convenient to blame it without a full grasp of it? If so, would it not be arbitrary to hold it responsible? So as to avoid subjectivity, a study of characters will shape society with a view to making the failure quite perceptible.

As individuals and members of a community, characters are citizens who have their personal positions on political, social, religious problems of their society. Their description is a transcription or reflection of the social process. As products of art and elements of representation, they are made of words, sentences and paragraphs pronounced by them or associated with them. Their understanding must be done through a look at the sentences that display and express the traits that contribute to their creation. Hence, their thoughts, beliefs, deeds, reactions, feelings, experiences and conducts must be taken into account. This study of characters identifies gathers and interprets information about them, so as to shape society. They are gradually examined gradually as follows: first, the white villains constituting the major portion of the white community, then generous white masters—the minor part of the white community, and finally, Negro characters with their slave community.

White Villains: The Majority

Among the many villains of the novel, Mr. Shelby, Haley, Mary St. Clare, Alfred St. Clare, Senator Bird and Simon Legree cannot be omitted. Mr. Shelby is a slave-owner who, on first reading, may be seen as a kind and honorable character. He is said to have let his wife provide comfort, instruction and betterment to their servants’ condition of life. Such a man comes to be indebted to Haley, the slave trader, and finds no other solution than sell some of



his slaves to his creditor. In so doing, he states: “Hum ... to tell the truth, it’s only hard necessity makes me willing to sell at all. I don’t like parting with any of my hands.” (*U.T.C.*, 13) He is then embarrassed and sorry to act that way, for as he adds, “the fact is, sir, I’m a humane man.” (*U.T.C.*, 15) Till now, Mr. Shelby can be regarded as a gentleman, and hence, gain the readers’ sympathy. As we go on, he gradually reveals his true nature. He has “the appearance of a gentleman.” (*U.T.C.*, 12)

The embarrassment he mentioned earlier is due to his fear of his wife’s reproaches. As a justification of his immoral deed, he views himself innocent, and his action quite normal, for as he says: “everyone does [it]every day.” (*U.T.C.*, 44) Still, on Tom’s departure, promises have been made concerning the saving of money to buy him back. Yet, Mr. Shelby says he was “premature” in making such promises.⁴ Then, his first picture reveals itself deceiving and disappointing. Still more, he finds that Negro servants do not deserve instruction, religious notions, education, for as he says, such things are unfitted for “a morality above their condition and prospects.” (*U.T.C.*, 275) He then shows himself discriminatory. He views his wife’s efforts to fulfill her promise as degrading and foolish. Still further, by calling Eliza’s Negro child with the degrading name “Jim Crow”, Mr. Shelby unveils his mask—his sympathy for Jim-Crowism, that is for racial discrimination and segregation.⁵ He is, in fact, a double-faced character who praises himself high whereas his true nature reveals him low and immoral. Dishonest and discriminatory, he stands inhumane, hypocritical and therefore, a villain.

Immorality is also embodied by the character of Haley, for whom Negroes are nothing but “fancy articles” (*U.T.C.*, 15) to make fortune with. Despising individual Negroes, he sets the black race inferior to whites, as he says, “these critters an’t [aren’t] like white folks.” (*U.T.C.*-16) He finds his trade normal and harmless. He then invests in that trade to make a living. Here and there, he constantly searches for slaves to buy and fatten so as to make them salable on the market. In so doing, he disorganizes several slave families, and causes incidents such as Lucy’s suicide on chapter XII. Having stolen and sold the latter’s baby, with bitter sarcasm, he consoles the lady saying: “you see it’s NECESSARY, and can’t be helped! You’re a smart wench, Lucy, I mean to do well by ye.” (*U.T.C.*, 145)

⁴*U.T.C.*, p. 275.

⁵ The term *Jim Crow* refers to the Negro stereotype who was a famous minstrel show personality throughout the 19th century, and whose name came later to stand for the segregation of Negroes, is said to have created in 1828 by the showman Thomas Rice (1808-60). Thomas blackened his face, wore old clothes, and performed a song and dance routine in which he imitated the jerky movements and unintelligible utterance of a decrepit and malformed Negro he claimed he had once seen. The term *Jim Crow* is taken to be offensive. It refers to racial discrimination and segregation. [Sources : *The Negro in America History III : Slaves New International Dictionary*, p. 1216]



No matter how indifferent to death Haley is, he is over-sensible in case of loss of money. He “swore that the gal [SIC] was a baggage, and that he was devilish unlucky, and that, if things went on in this way, he should not make a cent on the trip. In short, he seemed to consider himself an ill-used man.” (*U.T.C*, 147) Though misbehaving, Haley defends himself so eloquently and pretends to be humane: “[i]t’s always best to do the humane thing, sir, that’s been MY experience ... humanity, sir, I may say, is the great pillar of MY management.” (*U.T.C*, 16) In short, Haley is materialistic, discriminatory and inhumane. He is a shocking, sarcastic trader; very unfeeling and dreadful, with whom humanity comes out in a very strange form. His trade has caused him to lose virtue. He is a debauched and depraved character.

Inhumanity is also revealed through the autocratic values of Mary St. Clare, an unexceedingly selfish and materialistic mistress. Despite the indulgence, determination and devotion offered to her by Mammy, her servant, Mary is surprisingly ungrateful and selfish. For her personal welfare and interests, she separated Mammy from her husband and children forever, and therefore, debased that family. As a reward to the sacrifices of her servants, Mary would rather see them bitterly whipped. She is sadistic and discriminatory. She rebukes Evangeline, her daughter, for considering herself on an equal footing with every Negro: “You see, Evangeline ... it isn’t proper to treat them JUST as we [whites] would our relations, or people in our own class of life.” (*U.T.C*, 200) As an anti-abolitionist, she categorically refuses to complete the legal forms necessary to Tom’s liberty after her husband’s death. She confesses: “at any rate, I’m thankful I’m born where slavery exists; and I believe it’s right—indeed I feel it must be; and at any rate, I’m sure I couldn’t get along without it.” (*U.T.C*, 202)

Another white villain is Alfred St. Clare. He is an imperious and despotic master whose management of chattels is in full harmony with his aristocratic ideology. In fact, “from the cradle, Alfred was an aristocrat[A]ll his sympathies and all his reasoning were in that line.” (*U.T.C*, 247) With his equals—whites, Alfred is just and generous. However, he considers Negroes as creatures in an intermediary position between man and the brute. Toward them, he is authoritative, tyrannical and pitiless. For him, they deserve to be bought and exploited to the benefit of the upper class. They “must be KEPT DOWN, consistently, steadily.” (*U.T.C*, 289) For Alfred, no higher civilization can exist and resist without the enslavement of the masses—the Negro community. There must be an inferior class, condemned to physical works and reduced to animal life. There must also exist a superior class that possesses wealth and leisure; a domineering class that should lead and govern the rest of the world.

Concerning the issue of the slaves’ education and social equality, Alfred declares:



[A]ll men are NOT born free, nor born equal; they are born anything else It is the educated, the intelligent, the wealthy, the refined, who ought to have equal rights, and not the CANAILLE [the Negro]. [W]e'll take care of that, in this country. We must set our face against all this educating, elevating talk, that is getting about now, the lower class must not be educated. (*U.T.C.*, 289)

Stubbornly principled against the insubordination and instruction of Negroes, Alfred favors inequality and social injustice. He has handed his aristocratic ideology down to Henrique, his twelve year-old son, and Dodo's master. Henrique is hegemonic, insolent and brutal. An instance of his despotic arrogance toward Dodo, his thirteen year-old slave, comes as follows: "There, you impudent dog! Now will you learn not to answer back when I speak to you? Take the horse and clean it properly. I'll teach you your place!" (*U.T.C.*, 287) For his age, Henrique is cruel and wicked.

Politicians are represented by the character of Senator Bird, an anti-abolitionist legislator and slave-owner. As a politician, he is supposed to determine and protect the interests of his community. It is then that he contributes to pass a stringent fugitive slave law to preserve national interest. He urges his native state legislature to pass severe resolutions against escaping slaves and their sympathizers—white harborers and abettors. Thus, with an unprecedented zeal, the patriotic senator wins quite a reputation owing to his extreme eloquence. He is used to appealing to the feelings of his countrymen and to persuading them that infringing state laws involves a "great public evil" (*U.T.C.*, 93), and also that the law is a Christian one. Then, in an attempt to dismiss his wife's sentimental weaknesses, he advises: "Mary, ... we mustn't suffer our feelings to run away with our judgement; you must consider it's not a matter of private feeling—there are great public interest involved—there is such a state of public agitation rising that we must put aside our private feelings." (*U.T.C.*, 93). Senator Bird is then a zealous patriot who, in the eye of morals, stands as a "political sinner" (*U.T.C.*, 103), completely destitute of humanity.

Characterized with wrongdoing, Simon Legree is Tom's very last master; he who will cause his death. His plantation is, to a certain extent, a purgatory; a place of pain, torture, weariness, starvation, overwork and degradation. Legree is violent, authoritative, wicked and malignant. Surprisingly enough, he feels an inferiority complex in front of some of his chattels. He is jealous of Tom, and "secretly uneasy ..., for Cassy [a slave woman] had an influence over him from which he could not free himself." (*U.T.C.*, 396) By throwing Tom's Bible, Legree proclaims himself a new god, for as he tells Tom: "I'M your church now! ... [Y]ou've got to be as I say." (*U.T.C.*, 362) A tyrant and usurper of divine prerogative to give death, Legree is the walking caricature of the spirit of evil; a killer since he ordered Tom's death.



It then comes out that the majority of the white population consists of villains who have free and full legal power for control. Spurred up by state laws, they misuse their legal privilege. They then over-exploit Negroes to get the maximum of profits. Oppressive and imperious, their community is unprecedentedly proud and domineering; authoritative and tyrannical. Principled against abolitionism, these villains do not bear the idea of any welfare for the Negro masses. Surprisingly enough, they expertly feel and hide an inferiority complex and idleness, well embodied by Marie St. Clare, and well expressed by Augustine St. Clare as follows:

[B]ecause my [the white man's] brother Quashy [Negro] is ignorant and weak, and I am intelligent and strong—because I know how, and CAN do it—therefore, I may steal all he has, keep it, and give him only such and so much as suits my fancy. Whatever is too hard, too dirty, too disagreeable, for me, I may set Quashy to doing. Because I don't like work, Quashy shall work. Because the sun burns me, Quashy shall stay in the sun. Quashy shall earn the money, and I will spend it. Quashy shall lie down in every puddle, that I may walk over-shod. Quashy shall do my will, and not his, all the days of his ... life. (*U.T.C.*, 486)

Incompatible to the social trend, Augustine St. Clare unveils the secret of the white majority—a secret that stands for the nucleus and root of slavery.

In spite of the over-indulgence, care and devotion offered to them by Negroes, white populations remain unsatisfied just like Marie St. Clare, the neurasthenic gossip. In that atmosphere, politicians of whom Senator Bird is the representative, are anti-abolitionists determined to protect state interests. Consequently, they pass discriminatory laws, symbolized by the Fugitive Slave Law. Those patriots sensitize and persuade white countrymen that state laws are just, and that an infringement of such laws systematically implies an enormous “public evil.” The horizontal and vertical search through the white population has revealed the majority of its members inhumane. Yet, “there is no rule without exception.” There is a small group of masters who are characterized with generosity, nobility and humanity. Miss Ophelia, Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird and Augustine St. Clare are part of that group.

Contrary to Legree, Miss Ophelia offers a better and acceptable image. She is an energetic abolitionist; a straight, industrious and cultivated woman who has always felt the sense of duty. She feels indignation about the injustice and ill-treatments caused by whites against the Negro race. Principled against slavery, she blames its defenders. Though eloquent, her deeds are in discordance with her opinions. She has some prejudices, not against the slave, but against the Negro race. She “shrinks from the touch of a Negro.” (*U.T.C.*, 484) Considering the Negro's black complexion with disdain, there arises racism in her conduct. Though sinful, Ophelia appears as a noble-minded woman, since she realizes that she is blameworthy. She wishes a convenient education and treatment for slaves. Then, in an attempt to expiate her sins, she is henceforth determined to purge her heart and soul, and adjust her philosophy with action.

Thus, she decides to take Topsy, a Negro slave child, North in a free state so as to give her liberty. With such a resolution, Ophelia would stand there as a good and active reference for passive northern abolitionist gossips, and therefore spur them up to activism. She can be viewed as a tolerable character. In addition to her, comes Mrs. Shelby who appears as the embodiment of natural magnanimity.

Mrs. Shelby is a sensible and intellectual white woman whose high religious nature is consistently revered and respected. Benevolent and practical, she furnishes great efforts for the comfort and improvement of the condition of her servants. She treats them as she would treat her white fellows. Standing as a liberal and noble-hearted woman who hates injustice, she feels grief and indignation for the suffering of Negroes. With a high sense of sacrifice for others, Mrs. Shelby would rather have one of her own white children sold than consent with her husband to sell a servant. By showing kindness, she thought she could compensate for the wrongs the white society caused to slaves. Yet she realizes that her efforts are a drop in the ocean. She views slavery as:

A bitter, bitter, most accursed thing—a curse to the master and a curse to the slave! I was a fool to think I could make anything good out of such a deadly evil. It is a sin to hold a slave under laws like ours—I always felt it so ... but I thought I could gild it over—I thought, by kindness, and care, and instruction, I could make the condition of mine better than freedom—fool that I was! (*U.T.C.*, 45)

If slavery is noxious for Negroes, it is, just as Mrs. Shelby says, oppressive for kind masters. She is a commiserative and compassionate mistress who feels and shares the heart-burning and anger of the oppressed. She is an indulgent, humane and positive character, like Mrs. Bird.

Mrs. Bird's picture is highly pleasing, as far as moral values are concerned. She is principled against any cruel and unchristian conduct. Gifted with a sympathetic nature, she is always ready to share the feelings of slaves. She feels pity for the suffering of runaways, especially for Eliza and her child. Regarding the Fugitive Slave Law as unjust, Mrs. Bird is determined to break it, and obey the Christian principles that order to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the desolate, help the helpless, and protect the defenseless. She thinks that, instead of making immoral and draconian laws against Negroes, and preventing them from running away, white folks should treat them well. She is a hospitable, affectionate and protective woman who is guided by a strong sense of sacrifice for others. Though broken-hearted, she does not hesitate to offer to fugitive Eliza's child, the memorials of her own lost child Henry. Also sensitive is Augustine St. Clare.

Augustine St. Clare is a slave-owner who is light-hearted and tolerant. Having an inclination for idealism, he, though not a Christian, appears as a real practitioner of the doctrines of the Bible. He permits his chattels full liberty to do what they please. No matter how a sinner Augustine is, he does recognize his defects. Gifted with a critical mind, his forte is to talk, judge and criticize his white community. He remains however inactive in matter of implementing his ideology. Because of the practice of slavery, he has a repugnance of himself and of his countrymen. He regards himself blameworthy because of his behavior which is in disagreement

with his idealist philosophy. He therefore feels awkward, uncomfortable and irascible whenever he thinks of that controversial matter. Augustine appears as one of the protectors of slaves. For him, whites have made of the Negroes what they are, and therefore, slaves should neither be punished, nor be blamed for their faults. He accuses his white society for being inhumane—“I have been ready to curse my country, to curse the human race!” (*U.T.C*, 243)

Augustine also rejects aristocracy and despotism, the system on which his society is principled. Very realistic and experienced, he finds that the enfranchisement of slaves in the white world would be as a drop in the ocean. In his youth, Augustine wanted to upset the system and to become an emancipator, an abolitionist, to purge his land from the evil and shame caused by his community. That plan has however been a utopia, for he became a whirling citizen torn in a dilemma between his humanitarian ideology and the domineering and prevailing national trend. It is then that his life comes to be in discordance with his abolitionist philosophy. In short, Augustine St. Clare would rather eliminate slavery from the land, but cannot find any powerful means to reach his aim. As he confesses: “The most I can do is to try and keep out of the way of it.” (*U.T.C*, 239) Discontented with his past and present, he planned and began the legal steps for Tom’s emancipation when he suddenly died.

The study of uncommon white characters reveals that those unexpected white citizens embody natural magnanimity and generosity. Developing humane qualities, they are comforting, indulgent and pleasing. As liberals and noble-hearted whites, they hate injustice, and feel grief and indignation for the suffering of the oppressed and segregated Negro race. These sympathetic individuals who are gifted with a high sense of sacrifice are ready to help the unfortunate ones. They are ashamed of their anti-abolitionist countrymen, and view slavery as an intolerable and accursed thing to be eliminated at any rate. Commiserative and compassionate, they feel and share the heart-burning of Negroes. They are determined to transgress state law, suppress social injustice, discrimination, and then obey their private moral conscience. Such unexpected masters are charitable, affectionate and protective. Principled on idealism, and gifted with critical minds, they talk, judge, criticize and blame their white community because of its sinful conduct. Yet, they remain inactive.

Principled on humanitarianism those individuals accuse and reject the aristocratic and despotic rules adopted by their society, and assert themselves as democrats. They generally justify their indolence by the fact that the enfranchisement of the Negro would not change anything. Their good deeds and attempts would be as a drop in the ocean. They want to behave otherwise than follow the powerful and prevailing misconduct of the white majority. They are willing to upset the slave system and purge society from its evils. Yet such a will is nothing but a dream, for the negligible number of such “abolitionists” is a drop in the great tide. Therefore, they cannot help becoming whirling abolitionists torn between moral philosophy, conscience, responsibility and the popular domineering national current, that is, anti-abolitionism. As a consequence, their conducts, lives and deeds are in full discordance with their humanitarian ideologies. Augustine St. Clare points out:

If low-minded, brutal people will act like themselves, what am I [a good-natured person] to do? They [hard masters] have absolute control; they are irresponsible despots. There would be no use in interfering; there is no law that amounts to anything practically, for such a case. The best we [abolitionists] can do is to shut our eyes and ears, and let it alone. It’s the only resource left us The most I [as an abolitionist] can do is to try and keep out of the way of it. (*U.T.C*, 239)



Those professed abolitionists remain non-activists for lack of means, of any powerful and efficient method, condition and environment to reach their aim, for “one man can do nothing, against the whole action of a community.” (*U.T.C*, 292) In short, the minority of generous white masters is, to some extent, “oppressed” by the white majority of villains. It should however be borne in mind that the really oppressed portion of society in *U.T.C* is the slave community. In order to have a grasp of that social portion, a study of a sample of some of its members is necessary.

The Slave Community through Negro Characters

Part of the society in *U.T.C*, is the slave community. A picture of that social portion can be obtained through a study of its members. A survey of Negro characters can further help enlighten the moral failure of the society of *U.T.C*. Among those characters is Uncle Tom, a steady, honest, hardworking, sensible and trustworthy Christian; a patriarch in religious matters. Tom is predominantly a noble-hearted and faithful man, gifted with an extreme sense of sacrifice for others—whites or blacks. When he is informed of his sale, though upset, and having the possibility to run away, he refused to do so. He finds Mr. Shelby, his master, not blameworthy, for he would rather be sold alone and save the latter’s place than to cause his ruin. Though broken-hearted, Tom keeps a brave and manly heart, scouting his own sorrow to comfort the feeble ones. He is always ready to give help. Though Augustine St. Clare, his second master, began the legal steps for his emancipation and freedom, Tom sworn not to part from him unless the latter becomes a Christian. Tom then makes a Christ-like sacrifice of his own liberty and welfare to the redemption and salvation of his white master’s soul. Gifted with charity and commiseration for his fellow-sufferers, Tom is used to helping the weak, among whom was Cassy, a slave woman. Such a benevolence caused him to be bitterly whipped by Sambo and Quimbo, two brutal slaves, under the orders of Legree, their despotic master. Tom then underwent any kinds of atrocities; all aggravated by injustice and indignity. In spite of all that, he remained perfectly uncomplaining, submissive and docile until death. Another victim of Whites is Topsy.

Topsy, a Negro slave girl, is a product of the slave system. Her back and shoulders bear ineffaceable welts and spots; the essential marks of the system under which she has grown up. She is almost completely ignorant. She knows neither her age nor her birthplace. She has never known anyone of her family. Educated, she is, but in a very odd way; other than what is considered refined or civilized education. The fact is that, under republican system, slaveholders have expertly learned to educate Negroes in a brutish way. Slaves have been educated in barbarism; an education delivered by the use of the whip. Speculators have skillfully hypnotized their conscience. They have produced a sleep-like, animal state of the Negro, in

which, his mind and actions can be fully controlled by the masters who produce it. Masters have genuinely succeeded in convincing and inculcating in the Negro that he is hateful. As a consequence, the Negro hates himself. Topsy is stubbornly convinced that Negroes are the biggest sinners in mankind. Thinking of herself as being extremely wicked and horrible, she justifies her condition and conducts by the fact of the discriminatory state laws. Because of her black complexion, she has a strong disdain of herself. She would rather be skinned and become white so as to be fitted for goodness, good manners and good treatment, for she associates those notions with white complexion.

Under the slave system, the Negro is made to have a mortal repugnance of himself. Such a self-repugnance goes further to a point that it makes the latter hate his brothers of the same race. That is illustrated by Rosa and Jane, two servants of Augustine St. Clare, and by Sambo and Quimbo, Simon Legree's overseers. Rosa and Jane have a supreme disgust for Topsy. They would rather keep her out of their way or whipped. They contemn and laugh at her as being a low nigger. With their white masks but black skin spirit, they consider themselves as part of white folks. In addition to them, stand Sambo and Quimbo. Under the vigilant eye of Simon Legree and the republican education, Sambo and Quimbo have been made to hate each other. Such a hatred is profitable for Legree, for through the rivalry between his overseers, he can be informed at any moment, through denunciations, of what is going on his plantations. Though hating each other, Sambo and Quimbo join together in a mind of cordial hatred of the other Negroes—field hands, especially Tom. These ignorant, imbruted, debased and servile Negroes consider Tom to be noxious to their master's interests. Accordingly, as cooperators and instruments of white cruelty, in an attempt to defend Legree's interests, they come to overwhip Tom; a whipping that leads to his death.

The slave community appears as the really oppressed portion of society in *U.T.C.* It is neglected and inconsiderate by the oppressive white community. Negroes are made to tramp round the world, and are over-exploited. In spite of their sacrifices for the white folks, they harvest nothing but their masters' whip, draconian laws, misunderstanding and contempt. Under the Jim Crow system, the Negro is excluded from citizenship, and suffers from injustice and poverty. As an education, he is expertly trained in barbarism. His masters see to the hypnosis of his conscience, so as to have full control and hegemony over him. The education of the Negro is directed toward making him hate himself, as well as his race. Topsy, for example, wishes she had been skinned and become white. For her, blackness symbolizes evil, damnation, and whiteness, the essence of redemption, salvation and purity. The slave community is then revealed as childish and weak. Between masters and slaves, there is nothing



but the domination of the master, and submission of the slave. Masters are mystified and transformed into leviathans and liege lords, and slaves, into dependent children, drayhorses; instruments of production.

The Moral Failure

“I have been ready to curse my country, to curse the human race!” (*U.T.C.*, 243) Such are the words pronounced by Augustine St. Clare, a good-natured slave-holder and member of the powerful white society. Having discovered his society’s evils, he admits that it is blameworthy. His society has failed to do good, and is therefore morally indefensible. That failure implies a lack of performance of existing moral rules. It is a dereliction—a strong neglect or non-observance of the morally compelling duty. Society is full of feeble people in knowledge, and “infirm in moral constitution.” (*U.T.C.*, 473) Its principles are in disharmony with the moral ethics, and with the rules of God. Natural human values and sympathies are “swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy.” (*U.T.C.*, 473) Their moral consciences are dominated and corrupted by selfish interests, social status and state laws. Society embodies a general human depravity. It is an unsentimental world where love is literally “unknown”, and where people slid into an unprecedented evil. Society carries in its bosom great injustice, inhumanity and sin as its core values.

Society in *U.T.C.* has no place for love, fraternity or charity. To its power, Tom is a martyr; George Harris, Eliza, Cassy and Emmeline are fugitives. Undoubtedly, those slaves’ perception of the immoral trend of society motivates them to hurry away from it, in search for a promised land. By the act of flight, they deny any possibility of welfare. Those flights symbolize fear and quest for a tolerable life. It is not simply white tyranny over Negroes, but it is man’s tyranny over man, for both communities, white and black, are involved in the sin. They commit a collective crime; the crime against humanity; against the black race, for Negroes are the target. They are the main victims. Thus, Simon Legree is seen to exert sadism, tyranny and despotism upon his servant Tom. The unprecedented sadism exerted by Sambo and Quimbo, both blacks, on Tom, another black, is not to be neglected either. Then, the hatred by Negro servants Rosa and Jane of Topsy is not to be passed over in silence.

In shaping the white society, two portions—immoral villains and generous slave-owners, have been distinguished. Yet, it is said that society, as a whole, has morally failed. Are not generosity and indulgence demanded by moral duty? If so, why blame noble-minded masters for sin? The fact is that these generous slave-holders are only doing, in another form, what their aristocratic, tyrannical and despotic brothers of the white majority do by the Negro

race. They are convinced by the fact that slavery “is the more [sic] bold and [most] palpable infringement of human rights.”(*U.T.C*, 250) They stand aghast, with virtuous indignation, and yet they “do the [same] thing in a little different shape from what”⁶their brothers of the immoral great tide do. They are implicitly involved in the infringement of human rights, and are therefore the accomplices of immorality.

A tangible proof is that noble-minded masters too are slave-owners. They appropriate Negroes, body and spirit, to their use and convenience. They thereby acquire leisure, improvement and wealth at the expense of Negroes. Though, with them, the slaves are not atrociously whipped and starved to death, they are however, at their will, and therefore deprived of leisure and freedom. As slave-owners, generous masters have traded in human beings. They have bought and appropriated Negroes. They are accordingly involved in the slave trade and in all of its evil consequences. Actually, trading in Negroes, body and soul, just like horses, looking at his teeth, cracking his joints and then paying for him, appropriating him all over his life, him and his offspring, to the use and improvement of one’s own white and selfish interests, all these things, noble-hearted masters also do.

It is then crystal clear that sympathetic masters are not without any reproach. They are contented with their humanitarian thoughts, and do not want to do more harm than their tyrannical and aristocratic brothers. They are for the leisure and profits slavery can provide. Despite their hypocritical murmurs against the system, they are secretly for it. They own slaves, and keep them because these latter serve their interest, for “what do they have slaves for, if they don’t [defend it]?” (*U.T.C*, 240) Defending themselves, they could say they are generous and over-indulgent to their slaves, and that they do not abuse of them as despotic villains do. Is not the whole thing in itself the essence of abuse? Does not owning slaves systematically imply the approval of the system? Slavery is a necessary evil for humane masters too. They can neither part with it nor thrive without it. They have slaves work for them. As a consequence, they cannot help supporting it implicitly, for otherwise, they would be reduced to mediocrity. They always murmur against the system, and yet, they too, are implicitly sunk into immorality.

Though gossiping, they let themselves be whirled by the great tide. Why then is it so? Augustine St. Clare tries to give an answer: “Are you such a sweet innocent as to suppose nobody in this world ever does what they don’t think is right? Don’t you, or didn’t you ever, do anything that you did not think quite right?” (*U.T.C*, 240) Masters are then aware that owning slaves is not right. By playing idly with slavery and behaving insincerely toward evil, they trifle

⁶*U.T.C*, p. 232.



with the system. No matter how sweet statements of regret they produce, they pass over the sin in silence by shutting their eyes, hardening their hearts, and by that very act, give approval to the evil. They try to hide the truth that slavery is cruelty and immortality. They do not hesitate to consider themselves as “oppressed” by their domineering anti-abolitionist companions. They are aware of the immoral character of the system. They have shut their eyes over it, because they have much to gain by it, and also because that evil is not applied upon themselves. As such, the obloquy of slavery shall fall on the whole white society, for all masters, whether kind or cruel, are guilty, and should bear the responsibility of their deeds. Though judicially they cannot be held guilty, since state laws protect and encourage them, they are morally blameworthy.

Some evils inherent to the slave system, such as reification, discrimination, injustice, subordination, exploitation, draconian laws, trade and the heart-breaking, frustrating and traumatizing conduct of society have been detected and denounced. Consequently, a world of sadistic people has been shaped as a society “breaking up into discrete, atomistic individuals where human beings, white and black, can find no secure relation one with another.” (*U.T.C.*, 485) Still, a neglect and infringement of human rights has been noticed, and as a consequence, held whites responsible for society’s moral failure. However, who actually makes the despotic and tyrannical master? Who makes the trade that debauches its undertakers? Who is to blame?

Roughly, those who are responsible for state’s control are politician. They are in charge of the conduct of public and national affairs. They are endowed with executive, legislative and judicial powers. They have therefore the power to legislate, to make or enact laws. As the expression of the collective will that should be respected by anyone, laws have a strong weight on individuals and society, in their daily conduct. As Aristotle stated, “lawgivers make the citizens good by training them in habits of right action—the aim of all lawmaking, and if it fails to do this, it is a failure, this is what distinguishes a good Constitution from a bad one.”⁷ Laws then authorize individuals the right to do what can be thought adequate and proper. It however forbids them the right to undertake any act that may cause prejudices to the good working of society.

In *U.T.C.*, citizens are not principled on good doing. Their habits are in disharmony with the moral principle of right or good. Citizens have failed to do good because the Constitution encourages in that. For a better perception of the methods used by politicians to train society into immorality, a look at that Constitution seems necessary. In the American Constitution,

⁷Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 2, quoted here from *The Moral Foundation of the American Republic*, Third Edition, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986, p. 332.



three provisions relating to slavery are: Article I, section 2, paragraph 3, relating to the question of the inferiority of the Negro race. Then, Article I, section 9, paragraph 1 admitting the slave trade. Lastly, Article IV, section 2, paragraph 3, establishes the Fugitive Slave Law. Article I, section 2, paragraph 3 reads as follows:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States [which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons].⁸

Referring to the “three fifths of all other Persons”, the “other Persons” are nothing but Negro slaves, and the “free Persons” refers to whites. Thus, five slaves count as three whites. Does not that three-fifth rule imply a lack of full humanity in the Negro?

By equating five slaves with three whites, the Article arbitrarily reduces Negro worth, and over-evaluates white worth. It reduces the slave down to three-fifths of any white individual, and therefore favors the Negro’s social subordination. Encouraging injustice and discrimination, that Article leads citizens to warp and distort ethics to an astonishing degree. It is then not surprising if aristocratic Alfred St. Clare declares: “We can see plainly enough that all men are NOT born free, nor born equal; they are born anything else It is the educated, the intelligent, the wealthy, the refined, who ought to have equal rights, and not the CANAILLE [the Negro].” (*U.T.C*, 289) That principle encourages the idea of the Negro’s “inferiority”, and leads to his mistreatment for the benefit of whites. Referring to the slave trade, Article I, section 9, paragraph 1, reads as follows: “The Migration or Importation of such Person as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.”⁹The terms “such Persons” stand for slaves. This provision grants the legitimacy of the trade in Negroes. It is therefore not astonishing if Haley finds his trade right and normal, since state constitution considers it “proper to admit”.

Relating to the fugitive slave law, the last concession states that: “No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be

⁸We The People : The Constitution of The United States of America, with explanatory notes, adapted from The World Book Encyclopedia, World book, Inc., 1986 (United States Information Agency, 1987).

⁹Op cit p. 29.

due.”¹⁰The terms “Person held to service or Labour” refers to a slave. It is the kind of law Senator Bird, in *U.T.C*, contributed to pass so as to protect state interests. Politicians have then, on purpose, excluded the Negro from full humanity; from their “We the People” whose Preamble intends to “establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessing of Liberty.”¹¹Why then trifle with the constitutional principles.

According to the American historian Robert Horwitz, “at the time of the writing of the Constitution, there ... was a conflict between the rights of the slaves and the self-preservation of the masters.”¹² That conflict is well expressed by Thomas Jefferson, when he says: “we have a wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.”¹³ Hence, under the principles of the Preamble of the Constitution, there is the tendency to warp justice to self-preservation. Thus, slave-holders find necessary to maintain slavery, for they see in it personal and national interests to be preserved. Just like politicians, the Christian church is highly responsible for society’s moral failure.

As the caretaker of moral ethics, the church has to make divine or moral rules known by preaching sermons to the public. It is in charge of sensitizing individuals to accept moral principles, and adopt a course of correct conduct in their daily life. It has the duty to lead them out of the wrong way, and guide them toward good doing. Failure to do so inevitably leads to moral failure. Has the Church, in *U.T.C*, succeeded in inculcating moral ethics into society? If yes, why then does that society reveal itself immoral? The church has failed to do good. Hence, it has also failed in its vocation. Considering slavery as God’s will, it accepts it. It finds convenient to doom the Negro race to bondage. According to the church, whites “must all be resigned to the decrees of Providence, for Niggers must be sold, and trucked round, and kept under in social life.” (*U.T.C*, 138) Two tangible proofs substantiating the Church’s moral failure are the priests’ distortions and misinterpretations of the biblical language, and then, churchmen’s involvement in the slave trade. Churchmen too, feel no shame in trading in human souls. A member of the Christian church makes money by the sale of Susan and Emmeline. His story reads as follows: “Brother B, ... a Christian man ... felt some uneasiness on the subject. He didn’t like trading in slaves and souls of men ... but, then, there were thirty thousand dollars in the case, and that was rather too much money to be lost for a principle.” (*U.T.C*, 358) The

¹⁰ Ibid p.38.

¹¹Op cit p. 19.

¹²Herbert J. Storing in *The Moral Foundation of the American Republic*, p. 325.

¹³ibid



priests surprisingly and eloquently support and preach aristocratic values. Marie St. Clare praises Dr. G's sermon in these terms: "Dr. G—preached a splendid sermon ... and he showed how all the orders and distinctions in society came from God; and that it was so appropriate ... and beautiful, that some should be high and some low, and that some were born to rule and some to serve ... and he proved distinctly that the Bible was on our side, and supported all our intentions so convincingly." (*U.T.C*, 200)

The Christian church in *U.T.C* is deceptive and disappointing. Through its zealous, but shameful justification and defense of slavery, it has deviated from rectitude, and consequently reveals itself boldly dishonest and hypocritical, for after all, neither the clergymen nor "the world believe in it one particle the more." (*U.T.C*, 241) It is less considerate of man. Through its selfish and fraudulent appropriation of God as the supreme chief of the white race, and also being favorable to social stratification, the Church is unprecedentedly discriminatory and aristocratic. It has no moral integrity. Such a morally intolerable dereliction constitutes the motive of its crime. The Christian church has failed, and is therefore to blame. In short, both the white and black communities have morally failed, though the black one is the essential victim of whites, the obloquy of slavery shall fall on them all. The government and the Christian church which have to watch over the achievement of the moral ethics in society, have also failed in their vocation.

Conclusion

U.T.C is about the American slavery; a practice in the American past, and therefore, a historical fact. The novel is then an attempt to relate that historical fact that constitutes the core of its content. It gives an occasion to the reader to experience slavery in some of its phases, and at the same time, arouses in him a desire to know how that controversial problem had been dealt with in the American past; a past in which *U.T.C* is said to have played a remarkable role. The world of *U.T.C* is a slave society—a society that practices slavery, a system inseparable from some evils. Going a little bit backward, we remember that the need for an efficient labor force resulted in the enslavement of the Negro community, owing to a reification process which resulted in the accommodation of the Negro's human and social status to a mere chattel. That process, in turn, led to the development of discrimination and racism; all tending to subordinate the Negro socially.

Moreover, the desire of the white society to have full control and domination over the Negro masses, led them to set the black codes, that is, a series of discriminatory laws taken against blacks. Those rules deprived Negroes of all legal, social, human rights, in favor of the

white community. As a fundamental weapon for the ruling society—the white community, the law permitted any white individual total legal power, liberty and hegemony to use Negroes as they please. Consequently, here and there, Negroes are exposed to constant abuses. In such a universe, justice for the Negro is nothing but utopia.

Still more, the white society, in its untiring quest for social welfare, established trade in Negroes. As a vital support of national economy, the slave trade was a profitable business in which a lot of white people invested. Supported and encouraged by state laws, for “there are great public interest involved,” (*U.T.C*, 93) the slave trade created a group of white professional traders. Trade in human beings then becomes a salutary full-time occupation that permits a great part of white citizens to earn their lives.. In such a mercantile society where profitability is the catchword, Negro worth is valued for money. As a consequence, so as to increase profits, there develops a fattening process—a kind of zootechny intended to fatten and improve the physical appearance of purchases. Along with the trade, are the brutal, heart-breaking and forcible separations of the members of slave families, as well as the disorganization of the slave community.

Society in *U.T.C* has failed to do good. Hence, it has failed morally. Such a failure is due to the neglect and abandonment of moral ethics. The white society has been divided into two parts. The first, composed of villains, is inevitably immoral. The other portion of generous masters has also failed morally for being the accomplice of villains. By shutting their eyes on the evils inherent to the slave system; by holding their own slaves, and being indolent abolitionists, those kind masters are blameworthy. They are also immoral. If the whole white community is associated with immorality, it is of course vis-à-vis of the Negro one. However, it is important to note that the slave community is not saved the trouble of blame. Indeed, it stands as the only and inevitable victim of the white society’s immorality. However, it somehow contributes or cooperates to that sin exerted upon itself. In short, both the white and black communities have morally failed, though the black one is the essential victim of whites, the obloquy of slavery shall fall on them all. The government and the Christian church which have to watch over the implementation of the moral ethics in society have failed in their vocation.



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